Russo Hints Of Secrets Up for Sale

6/27/67

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

Perry Russo, the star witness in District Attorney Jim Garrison's investigation of President Kennedy's assassination, has repeatedly hinted that he was willing to disclose "weaknesses" in his testimony — for a price.

"I'm looking for guarantees," he told me. "I'm interested in me, my job and money."

Russo has been the keystone of Garrison's claims that the President's murder in 1963 was the result of a plot hatched in New Orleans.

Prodded by hypnosis and sodium pentothal, the 26-year-old insurance salesman has sworn that he heard retired businessman Clay Shaw plotting with now-dead pilot David W. Ferrie and Lee Harvey Oswald to murder the President. The Warren Commission said Oswald acted alone in the assassination, but Shaw has been indicted for conspiracy, largely on Russo's testimony.

Credibility Attacked

The National Broadcasting Co. attacked Russo's credibility Monday night in an hour-long television documentary.

At a news conference with Garrison in New Orleans Tuesday, Russo responded by charging that NBC newsmen alternated between promises and threats in seeking his help to "wreck the Garrison investigation."

NBC denied the accusations. NBC newsman Walter Sheridan said Russo fished around for offers, but that NBC never bit.

Russo also took the initiative in conversations with me last week in New Orleans. He got no response. I had made contact with him to check on reports of an abortive "lie detector" test given him in March before taking the witness stand against Shaw.

Admits Taking Test

Russo acknowledged taking the test. He also said, without being asked that there were certain "weaknesses" or "holes" surrounding his testimony.

"Garrison doesn't know what they are," he said. "I know what they are."

Stating that he had to "look out for myself," Russo said he had no intention of disclosing the weaknesses" to any newsman without getting something in return; he also expressed dissatisfaction with the $3000 he said Garrison's office had given him for expenses. At another point, he said he might decide to supply Shaw's attorneys with an opportunity to demolish his testimony.

But "if you say anything about this ," Russo added, I'm going to have to call you a liar."